

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 7238

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EWWT EG
SUBJECT: SUEZ CANAL RESTRICTIONS

REF STATE 171626

1. SINCE THERE IS NO RPT NO AMERICAN EXPORT LINES (AEL) REP IN CAIRO, WE ASKED CONGEN ALEXANDRIA MAKE DISCREET INQUIRIES INDICATED PARA 2 REFTEL. THESEPRODUCED INFORMATION PROVIDED BELOW.

2. ACCORDING TO TAWIL, ALEXANDRIA SHIPPING AND NAVIGATION CO. (ALEXSHIP), AEL REP, THERE HAS BEEN NO REPEAT NO OFFICIAL REQUEST IN WRITING FOR CERTIFICATE STATING THAT ALL AEL SHIPS TRANSITING SUEZ CANAL IN FUTURE WILL NOT CALL AT ANY ISRAELI PORT OR COOPERATE WITH ISRAELI AUTHORITIES. HOWEVER, CUSTOMS, PORT AND SECURITY POLICE ALLEGEDLY INDICATED THAT THEY WANTED SUCH STATEMENT.

3. TAWIL PROVIDED CERTIFICATE IN CASE OF ONE AEL SHIP WHICH HE SAYS WAS BOARDED BY POLICE TO INVESTIGATE LOGS OF PREVIOUS VOYAGES. IN ORDER TO PREVENT POSSIBLE HARASSMENT, TAWIL HAS RECOMMENDED TO AEL OFFICE GENOA THAT SIMILAR CERTIFICATE LISTING AND COVERING ALL AEL VESSELS BE PROVIDED.

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4. WHEN QUESTIONED BY CONSULAR OFFICER, TAWIL AND ALSO ALEXSHIP PRESIDENT MAHMOUD ISMAIL ADMITTED NO RPT NO REAL PROBLEM EXISTED AND THAT INITIAL CERTIFICATE WAS FURNISHED ON VOLUNTARY BASIS ON THEIR OWN RESPONSIBILITY. THEY SOUGHT SECOND CERTIFICATE FOR ALL VESSELS TO AVOID POSSIBLE HARASSMENT, SUCH AS PORT POLICE REQUESTS TO SEE LOGS OF PREVIOUS VOYAGES, AND TO ENSURE THAT SHIPS WOULD BE ABLE OBTAIN SUPPLIES AND WATER FROM CITIES AT EITHER END OF CANAL. THEY INDICATED, HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO RPT NO QUESTION OF SHIPS NOT RPT NOT BEING PERMITTED TO TRANSIT CANAL IN ABSENCE OF CERTIFICATE. IN FACT, BOTH CLAIMED NO RPT NO REAL PROBLEM EXISTED, ALTHOUGH ISMAIL INITIALLY RELATED PECULIAR TALE OF MINISTER OF MARITIME TRANSPORT'S ALLEGED INTENTION TO CREATE TROUBLE FOR US VESSELS WHICH HE WAS ABLE TO COUNTER BY DRAWING TO ATTENTION OF PRESIDENT SADAT WHO INSTRUCTED PRIMIN SALIM TO ORDER SCA CHAIRMAN MASHOUR TO PREVENT ANY SUCH RESTRICTIONS BEING IMPOSED. HE ADDED THAT, SUBSEQUENTLY, ALL PROBLEMS HAS BEEN OVERCOME.

5. WHILE IT APPEARS THAT SPECIFIC REQUEST FOR CERTIFICATE WAS VOLUNTARY INITIATIVE ON PART OF ALEXSHIP, IT WAS UNDOUBTEDLY PROMPTED BY INTERVENTION OF POLICE AUTHORITIES.

6. WE NOTED DEPARTMENT'S DESIRE THAT ISSUE NOT BE RAISED AT THIS TIME WITH ANY GOE OFFICIALS AND WILL COMPLY. HOWEVER, WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT ACTIONS REPORTED REFTEL STEM FROM MIDDLE GRADE EGYPTIAN BUREAUCRATS IN ALEXANDRIA AND PORT SAID AREAS WHO ARE ACTING ON THEIR OWN AND PERHAPS BASED ON BROADER PRECEDENTS RELATED TO ARAB BOYCOTT. WE HAVE NO RPT NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT GOE AT HIGHER LEVELS WANT SUCH RESTRICTIONS APPLIED. IN OUR VIEW, IF AEL SHOULD EXPERIENCE ANY FURTHER HARASSMENT OR DIFFICULTIES IN THIS CONNECTION, ISSUE SHOULD BE RAISED WITH FAHMY AND SOON BEFORE PATTERN BECOMES ESTABLISHED. IF OUR ASSUMPTION IS CORRECT, IT WILL TAKE HIGH LEVEL ORDER TO GET THE OFFENDING EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS TO DESIST. SUCH CONFIDENTIAL

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RESTRICTIONS ON AMERICAN VESSELS HARDLY SEEM JUSTIFIABLE AFTER MAJOR US CONTRIBUTION TO SUEZ CANAL REOPENING AND CAN, WE BELIEVE, BE ELIMINATED THROUGH APPROACH TO GOE AT HIGH LEVEL.
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